

Turkey reopens Armenian church

by UPI

VAN, Turkey - Armenian officials came to Turkey for a ceremony marking the renovation of an 11-century-old church.

Turkey and Armenia do not have diplomatic relations. But the reopening of the church as a museum is perceived as a fence-mending gesture by the Turkish government, the BBC reports.

Patriarch Mesrob II, who heads the Armenian Orthodox Church in Turkey, said the government could improve relations by allowing religious services to be held in the church at least once a year.

"If our government approves, it will contribute to peace between two communities who have not been able to come together for years," he said.

The government spent \$1.5 million on the Church of Surp Khach, or Holy Cross, on Akdamar Island in Lake Van. The building, dating from around A.D. 920, is considered one of the finest surviving Armenian monuments in Turkey.

Deputy Culture Minister Gagik Gyurjyan headed an Armenian delegation of about 20 who attended the ceremony.

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